

## GLAXO SAYS MOST DRUGS DON'T WORK ON MOST PATIENTS

A senior executive with Britain's biggest drugs company has admitted that most prescription medicines do not work on most people who take them.

Dr Allen Roses, worldwide Vice-President of Genetics at GlaxoSmithKline, said fewer than half of the patients prescribed some of the most expensive drugs actually derived any benefit from them.

It is an open secret within the drugs industry that most of its products are ineffective in most patients, but this is the first time that such a senior drugs boss has gone public.

Drugs for Alzheimer's disease work in fewer than one in three patients, whereas those for cancer are only effective in a quarter of patients. Drugs for migraines, osteoporosis and arthritis work in about half the patients, Dr Roses said.

Most drugs work in fewer than one in two patients, mainly because the recipients carry genes that interfere in some way with the medicine, he said.

"Roses is a smart guy, and what he is saying will surprise the public but not his colleagues," said one industry scientist. "He is a pioneer of a new culture within the drugs business based on using genes to test for who can benefit from a particular drug."



Dr Roses has a formidable reputation in the field of "pharmacogenomics"—the application of human genetics to drug development—and his comments can be seen as an attempt to make the industry realise that its future rests on being able to target drugs to a smaller number of patients with specific genes.

"Neither those who pay for medical care nor patients want drugs to be prescribed that do not benefit the recipient. Pharmacogenetics has the promise of removing much of the uncertainty," Dr Roses said.

(Source: The Independent, UK, 8 December 2003)

## DRUG COMPANIES KNEW HRT RISKS FIVE YEARS BEFORE THE PUBLIC

Drug companies knew about the health risks surrounding hormone replacement therapy (HRT) five years before members of the public were informed.

Thousands of women may have been put at unnecessary risk because they were involved in HRT trials when experts knew that the menopause treatments increased the risk of heart disease.

But the data, collated by the drug companies for licensing applications for their HRT products, was kept secret and not published. Experts who tried to raise concerns about HRT were ridiculed.

Researchers say the HRT case exposes the "strong vested interests and biased reporting" in the way drugs are licensed and tested by pharmaceutical companies.

(Source: The Independent, UK, 28 February 2004)

## PENTAGON GEARS UP FOR SPACE-BASED WEAPONS

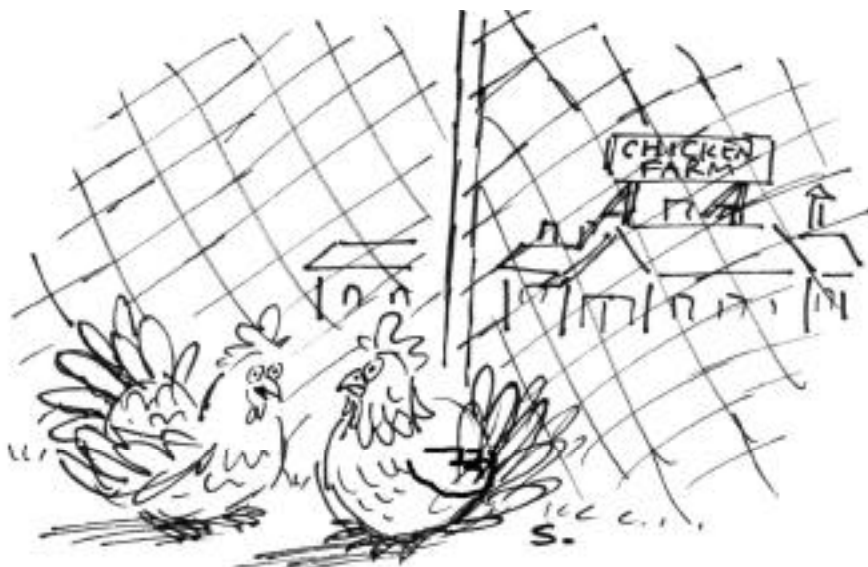
A United States Air Force report is giving what analysts call the most detailed picture since the end of the Cold War of the Pentagon's efforts to turn outer space into a battlefield.

The US Air Force Transformation Flight Plan, released last November, makes US dominance of the heavens a top Pentagon priority in the new century. And it runs through dozens of research programs designed to ensure that America can never be challenged in orbit—programs from anti-satellite lasers to weapons that "would provide the capability to strike ground targets anywhere in the world from space".

Space has become an increasingly important part of US military efforts. Satellites are used more and more to talk to troops, keep tabs on foes and guide smart bombs. There's also long been recognition that satellites may need some sort of protection against attack.

But the Air Force report goes far beyond these defensive capabilities, calling for weapons that can cripple other countries' orbiters.

That prospect worries some analysts that the United States may spark a worldwide arms race in orbit.



"They're working on something to stop this 'flu from killing us, so they can restore confidence to the business of killing us themselves."

# ... GLOBAL NEWS ...

This year, the US Air Force will spend hundreds of millions of dollars to find ways to track enemy satellites and, if necessary, blind those eyes in the sky.

So far, space-based arms are legal. The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 only bans nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction from orbit.

Over the years, US administrations have looked into developing such weapons—most notably, as part of President Reagan's "Star Wars" anti-missile initiative.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has long advocated sending arms into orbit. Just before taking office in 2001, he chaired a commission on space and national security which warned that the country could face a "space Pearl Harbor" in the years to come. This calamity must be avoided, the commission declared, asserting that the best way to do that is to "vigorously pursue the capabilities...to ensure that the President will have the option to deploy weapons in space".

(Source: Wired Magazine, 20 February 2004, <http://www.wired.com>)

## FDR'S CLOSEST ADVISER WAS A SOVIET SPY

The British government has announced that former Soviet KGB archivist Vasili Mitrokhin, 81, died from pneumonia on 23 January.

Mitrokhin first came to the public's attention in 1999 with the publication of *The Sword and The Shield*, an exposé of the KGB and its operations in the US and Europe. The book was based on notes and materials from classified KGB files, copied by Mitrokhin from 1972 until his retirement in 1984. He defected in 1992 and his materials were later spirited out of Moscow by British agents.

Accuracy in Media first reported on Mitrokhin's revelations shortly after the book's publication. Reed Irvine particularly valued the book for providing "new evidence" that Harry Hopkins, Franklin D. Roosevelt's closest and most influential adviser, was a Soviet spy.

Mitrokhin turned to British intelligence, where his materials eventually led to the identification of several Soviet spies in both Britain and the United States. Among these were Melita Norwood, who admitted giving British nuclear secrets to the Soviets, and a former Scotland Yard policeman, who became the KGB's first "Romeo spy".

[Editor's Note: Readers may recall our

publishing excerpts of *From Major Jordan's Diaries* (see NEXUS 4/01, 4/02), detailing the covert handover of A-bomb materials to the Russians. It is clear that Harry Hopkins was not acting alone in helping arm the Soviet Union. Another case of manufacturing your own (bogus) enemy?]

(Source: Accuracy in Media, 4 March 2004, [http://www.aim.org/publications/media\\_monitor/2004/03/03.html](http://www.aim.org/publications/media_monitor/2004/03/03.html))

## NERVE CELLS GROWN ON CHIP CAN COMMUNICATE

Researchers at the University of Calgary, Canada, have found that nerve cells grown on a microchip can learn and memorise information which can be communicated to the brain.

"We discovered that when we used the chip to stimulate the neurons, their synaptic strength was enhanced," said Naweed Syed, a neurobiologist at the University of Calgary's Faculty of Medicine.

The nerve cells also exhibited memory traces that were successfully read by the chip, said Syed, co-author of the landmark study published in the February edition of the international journal *Physical Review Letters*.

The research was done in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute for Biochemistry in Munich, Germany.

The team cultured nerve cells from a snail and placed them on a specially designed silicon chip. Using a microcapacitor on the chip, scientists stimulated one nerve cell to communicate with a second cell which transmitted that

signal to multiple cells within the network. A transistor located on the chip then recorded that conversation between cells.

Syed said the discovery is groundbreaking. "We've made a giant leap in answering several fundamental questions of biology and neuro-electronics that will pave the way for us to harness the power of nanotechnology," he said.

The findings could help in the design of devices that combine electronic components and brain cells—for example, for controlling artificial limbs or restoring sight for the visually impaired.

Future research will focus on interfacing silicon chips with the human brain to control artificial limbs and develop "thinking" computers.

(Source: The Globe and Mail, Toronto, Canada, 2 February 2004)

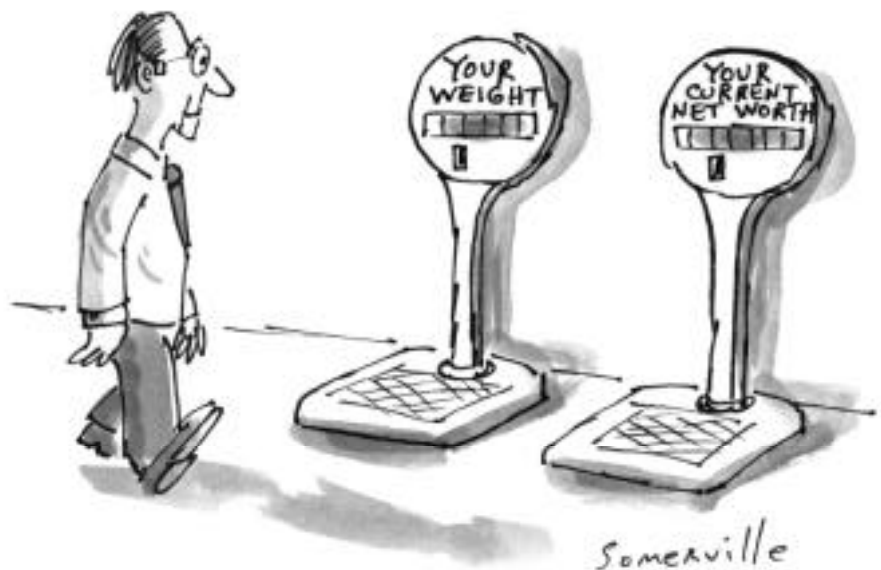
## FORMER ASTRONAUT ADMITS "WE ARE NOT ALONE"

The sixth man to walk on the Moon, Apollo XIV astronaut Edgar Mitchell, declared "The aliens have landed" in front of more than 200 admirers at a conference in St Petersburg, Florida, in February.

"A few insiders know the truth...and are studying the bodies that have been discovered," he said.

Mitchell, who landed on the Moon with Alan B. Shepard, said a "cabal" of insiders stopped briefing presidents about extraterrestrials after President Kennedy.

Dr Mitchell, who has a science doctorate from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, noted that 30 years ago it was accepted that man is alone in the Universe.



# ... GLOBAL NEWS ...

Few people believe that now, he said.

Besides aliens, Mitchell talked about being freed of prostate cancer during a healing ceremony and about his epiphany while returning from the Moon.

(Source: St Petersburg Times, Florida, USA, 18 February 2004, <http://www.sptimes.com/>)

## BRAIN FINGERPRINTING: THE FAILSAFE LIE DETECTOR?

Seattle, Washington — A controversial technique for identifying a criminal mind using involuntary brainwaves that could reveal guilt or innocence is about to take centre stage in a last-chance court appeal against a death-row conviction in the United States.

The technique, called "brain fingerprinting", has already been tested by the FBI and has now become part of the key evidence to overturn the murder conviction of Jimmy Ray Slaughter, who is facing execution in Oklahoma.

Brain fingerprinting, developed by Dr Larry Farwell, chief scientist and founder of Brain Fingerprinting Laboratories, is a method of reading the brain's involuntary electrical activity in response to a subject being shown certain images relating to a crime. During the test, the suspect wears a headband equipped with sensors that measure the electrical activity.

Unlike the polygraph or lie detector to which it is often compared, the accuracy of this technology lies in its ability to pick up the electrical signal, known as a p300 wave, before the suspect has time to affect the output.

"It is highly scientific. Brain fingerprinting doesn't have anything to do with the emotions, whether a person is sweating or not; it simply detects scientifically if that information is stored in the brain," says Dr Farwell.

"It doesn't depend upon the subjective interpretation of the person conducting the test. The computer monitors the information and comes up with information present or information absent."

Brain fingerprinting has profound implications for the criminal justice system.

(Source: BBC News, World Edition, 17 February 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/3495433.stm>)

## DRUG COMPANY-FUNDED TRIALS HAVE MORE FAVOURABLE RESULTS

The public is being regularly deceived by the drug trials funded by pharmaceutical companies, loaded to generate the results they need, according to the editor of the *British Medical Journal*.

Pharmaceutical companies spend hundreds of millions of pounds to bring a new drug to market, and tens of millions of pounds to do the clinical trials that are necessary for both registration and marketing. Understandably, they prefer *not* to get results from these trials that are unfavourable to their drug.

A review published in 2003 found 30 studies that had compared the results of trials funded by drug companies with those funded by other sources. Trials funded by companies were four times more likely to

have results favourable to them than those funded by others.

All this matters greatly because 70 per cent of trials in major medical journals are funded by the drug industry. Companies often buy reprints of these articles to use in promoting their drugs.

Virtually all research on drugs is funded by the industry, because governments have taken the view that public money can be better spent elsewhere.

The end result is that information on drugs (on which Britain spends £7 billion a year) is distorted.

(Source: The Guardian, 14 January 2004)

## MONSANTO'S GM FAILURE

A showcase project to develop a genetically modified/engineered crop for Africa has failed.

Three years of field trials have shown that GM sweet potatoes modified to resist a virus were no less vulnerable than ordinary varieties, and sometimes their yield was lower, according to the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute. Embarrassingly, in Uganda, conventional breeding has produced a high-yielding resistant variety more quickly and more cheaply.

The GM project has cost Monsanto, the World Bank and the US government an estimated US\$6 million over the past decade. It had been held up worldwide as an example of how GM crops will help revolutionise farming in Africa. One of the project members, Kenyan biotechnologist Florence Wambugu, even toured the world promoting the work.

Monsanto says it plans to develop further varieties.

(Source: New Scientist, vol. 181, no. 2433, 7 February 2004)

## REMOTELY TRIGGERED CAR IMMOBILISERS ON THE WAY

The battle to cut car crime is moving up a gear with the advent of immobilisers that can be triggered remotely.

A control box fitted to the car incorporates a miniature cellphone, a microprocessor and memory, and a GPS satellite positioning receiver. If the car is stolen, a coded cellphone signal will tell the unit to block the vehicle's engine management system and prevent the engine being restarted. There are even plans for immobilisers that shut down vehicles on the move, though there are fears over the safety implications of such a system.

For now, such devices are only available



for fleets of trucks and specialist vehicles used on construction sites. But remote immobilisation technology will soon start to trickle down to ordinary cars, and should be available in the UK in two months.

In the USA, fear of litigation is discouraging the whole idea of using remote immobilisers: no one wants to be responsible for, say, blocking ambulance access.

Police in the UK would like to see cars fitted with immobilisers that could be activated while the thief is driving along. They argue this would enhance road safety by putting an end to high-speed car chases. (Source: *New Scientist*, vol. 181, no. 2435, 21 February 2004)

## WRONG DIAGNOSES ARE KILLING PATIENTS

Many patients in intensive care units are being wrongly diagnosed, according to a study in a UK hospital. Some are dying because doctors fail to spot major conditions such as heart attack, cancer and pulmonary embolism. The reason, experts say, is not incompetence but that so few post-mortems are now performed that doctors cannot learn from their mistakes.

Fang Gao Smith, a consultant in intensive care medicine at Birmingham Heartlands Hospital, and her team checked the accuracy of diagnoses by comparing post-mortem results with patients' medical records. In 39 per cent of cases, they found major problems had been missed.

The problem is not limited to one hospital or to the UK. Gao Smith says her findings are consistent with other studies done in Europe and the US. She thinks doctors place too much faith in sophisticated scanners when making diagnoses and are failing to learn from their mistakes because fewer and fewer autopsies are being done, both in the UK and the US. "If we did more post-mortems, it might be possible to save more people in the future," Gao Smith says. The decline needs to be reversed as a matter of urgency, she says.

The study also raises the question of how many other patients are being misdiagnosed. Gao Smith says the frequent misdiagnoses in intensive care units should set alarm bells ringing in other areas of medicine. "It's not always possible to talk to intensive care patients. But they are also scrutinised and monitored more than any other patients, so I'm not sure we can say that they are more likely to suffer misdiagnosis."

(Source: *New Scientist*, 21 February 2004)

## THE TEN WORST CORPORATIONS OF 2003

by Russell Mokhiber and Robert Weissman © 2004

Here follows, in alphabetical order, the *Multinational Monitor* list of the 10 worst corporations of 2003.

**Bayer:** In May, the company agreed to plead guilty to a criminal count and pay more than US\$250 million to resolve allegations that it denied Medicaid discounts to which it was entitled. The company was beleaguered with litigation over its anticholesterol drug, Baycol. Bayer pulled the drug—linked to a sometimes fatal muscle disorder—from the market, but is facing thousands of lawsuits from patients who allege they were harmed by the drug.

**Boeing:** In one of the grandest schemes of corporate welfare in recent memory, Boeing engineered a deal whereby the Pentagon would lease tanker planes—767s that refuel fighter planes in the air—from Boeing. The price tag of US\$27.6 billion was billions more than the cost of simply buying the planes. The deal may unravel, though, because the company fired for wrongdoing both the employee who negotiated the contract for Boeing (the company's chief financial officer) and the employee who negotiated the contract for the government. How could Boeing fire a Pentagon employee? Simple. She was no longer a Pentagon employee. Boeing had hired her shortly after the company clinched the deal.

**Brighthouse:** A new-agey advertising/consulting/strategic-advice company, Brighthouse has a claim to infamy with its Neurostrategies Institute. In a cutting-edge effort to extend and sharpen commercial reach in ways never before possible, the Institute is using MRI to monitor brain activity and response triggered by advertisements and advertising campaigns.

**Clear Channel:** The radio behemoth Clear Channel specialises in consuming or squashing locally owned radio stations, imposing an homogenised music playlist on once-interesting stations and offering cultural support for US imperial adventures. It has a record of violating the law—including prohibitions on deceptive advertising and broadcasting conversations without obtaining permission of the second party to the conversation—on 36 separate occasions over the previous three years.

**Diebold:** An Ohio-based company that is one of the largest US manufacturers of electronic voting machines as well as an aggressive peddler of these machines, Diebold has managed to demonstrate that it fails any reasonable test of qualifications for involvement with the voting process. Its CEO has worked as a major fundraiser for President George W. Bush. Computer experts revealed serious flaws in its voting technology, and activists showed how careless it was with confidential information. Diebold threatened lawsuits against activists who published on the Internet company documents showing its failures.

**Halliburton:** The company which initially drafted plans for privatisation of US military functions during the Bush I administration—when current Vice President and former Halliburton CEO Dick Cheney was Secretary of Defense—is pulling in billions of dollars in revenue from contract work—providing logistical support ranging from oil to food—in Iraq. Tens of millions, at least, appear to be overcharges. Some analysts say Halliburton's charges for oil provision amount to "highway robbery".

**HealthSouth:** Fifteen of its top executives have pleaded guilty in connection with a multibillion-dollar scheme to defraud investors, the public and the US government about the company's financial condition. It appears that HealthSouth itself will get off scot free—no indictments, no pleas, no fines, no probation.

**Inamed:** The California-based company sought Food and Drug Administration approval for silicone breast implants, even though it was not able to present long-term safety data—the very thing that led the FDA to restrict sales of silicone implants a decade ago. In January 2004, the FDA denied Inamed's application for marketing approval.

**Merrill Lynch:** Fresh off a US\$100 million fine levied because analysts were recommending stocks that they trashed in private emails, the company saw three former executives indicted for shady dealings with Enron. Merrill Lynch itself managed to escape with something less than a slap on the wrist—no prosecution in exchange for "oversight".

**Safeway:** One of the largest US grocery chains, Safeway is leading the charge to demand give-backs from striking and locked-out grocery workers in southern California. Along with Albertsons and Ralphs (Kroger's), Safeway's Vons and Pavilion stores are asking employees to start paying for a major chunk of their health insurance. Under the company's proposals, workers and their families will each lose US\$4,000 to \$6,000 a year in health benefits.

(Source: Authors' article posted 5 February 2004 at <http://lists.essential.org/pipermail/corpfocus/2004/000173.html>. Russell Mokhiber edits the Washington, DC-based Corporate Crime Reporter, <http://www.corporatecrimereporter.com>; Robert Weissman edits the Washington, DC-based Multinational Monitor, <http://www.multinationalmonitor.org>)